16

May

Back from Cuverville. Recalled suddenly by the news of the birth of Jeanne's child.

At Cuverville, good work for fourteen days.

Excellent piano-practice (exclusively Chopin: nocturnes, finale of the Sonata in B-flat minor, etc.).

This evening at rue Drouot, for the Kessler sale, directed by Druet Among those present Mme Redon, Mme Denis, who is taking part in her husband's ascent (the prices have quadrupled in the last three years), and Maus. I sit near Feneon, not far from Druet himself; not far likewise from Coolus; Lebey comes and sits beside me. We chat and our conversation soon distracts me from the sale. I had noted the first bids; I soon lose sight even of the paintings. And this is why I shall cease going to such sales:

A Bonnard is put up at auction, rather badly put together, but racy; it represents a naked woman dressing and I have already seen it somewhere or other. It climbs rather painfully to 450,55, 60. Suddenly I hear a voice shout: "600!" —And I am dazed, for I myself am the one who just shouted. With my eyes I implore a higher bid from those around me —for I have no desire to own the painting — but nothing is forthcoming. I feel myself becoming purple and begin to sweat copiously. TLt's stifling in here/* I say to Lebey. We leave.

Such impulses are absurd. Already a similar experience had occurred to me at the same place. And the most ridiculous thing of all is to be angry with myself afterward; generally speaking, it is only with difficulty that I am *resigned to myself.* (The oddest fact is that the bidding was still this side of 500 francs, so that in rounding out the sum they counted my bid as only 500 francs, as the bill showed the next day; and yet, I am certain, it was 600 francs that I shouted.)

To thank him for his article on Signoret, I have decided to read Mithouard's *Les Pas sur le sable.** There is no denying that the style is racy. He has only one idea; and the need of constantly justifying it There is nothing so boring as his continual domination by that single thought. And since he is afraid of boring, he has recourse to a sort of odd humor, which none the less seems rather spontaneous.

As an example of the *proofs* with which he is intellectually satisfied, take this, as early as page 3 in the volume: he relates an ascent in a balloon (in order to prove that one must not lose physical contact with ^the earth and the dead"); he describes his sensations of fright, the only ones

[8] *Footprints in the Sand.*